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TAGS: [EAID](#) [TBIO](#) [SOCI](#) [SENV](#) [TSPL](#) [KSQA](#) [EAGR](#) [OIE](#)

SUBJECT: AVIAN FLU: WORLD ORGANIZATION FOR ANIMAL  
HEALTH DG OUTLINES PLANS TO COUNTER THREAT IN ADVANCE OF  
JANUARY 17-18 BEIJING PLEDGE CONFERENCE

1. Summary: In Advance of the January 17-18 International Conference on Avian and Human Pandemic Influenza, The Director General of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) is pleased with the level of cooperation among the various international organizations leading this effort (World bank, FAO, WHO). OIE Director General Dr. Bernard Vallat also expressed satisfaction that U/S Dobriansky consulted with him in September 2005 on USG efforts. Vallat reported that the work of his organization had informed proposals that the World Bank will table for consideration by donors in Beijing. He underlined his organization's willingness to continue to take a leading role in enhancing mechanisms to improve veterinary services at the global and regional levels. Vallat stressed that sustainability and capacity building will be key to countering avian flu and to averting future crises, as is the case in current international efforts to establish a tsunami mitigation network. Vallat noted that in addition to the threat posed to human life, animal diseases (epizooties) also pose a sometimes devastating, though less well-publicized, threat to the livelihood of many rural poor.

2. In addition, Vallat stressed his organization's work in countering the threat of bio-terrorism, including with the Ames laboratory. Vallat described working relations with the USG good overall, expressing satisfaction with the OIE's role in providing a scientific basis for resolving potential trade disputes, stemming from its WTO mandate. He also highlighted other potential areas of U.S. engagement (paras 7-8). End Summary.

In Beijing run-up, OIE posed to work globally, regionally

3. USUNESCO Science Officer met with World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Director Bernard Vallat to preview the OIE's role at the January 17-18 Beijing pledging conference. USDA secondee Alejandro Thiermann also attended the meeting. On avian flu, Vallat reported, the World Bank is taking the lead in coordinating potential donors. He said that the Bank would table detailed proposals, informed by the work of the OIE. The price tag will total approximately 1 billion USD, half of that going to animal health (mainly control), half to human and public health (mainly prevention and preparation).

4. Vallat said that international efforts to counter avian influenza need to be organized on three levels. At the global level, there should be a coordination mechanism (with the participation of international organizations, funding agencies and private sector players) to promote good governance mechanisms for veterinary health policies. This would entail working with stakeholders to define priorities for governance, standards, capacity building and training, with a focus on sustainability. A global approach is necessary, because inadequate veterinary service standards prevailing in any single country now pose a threat to all.

5. At the regional level, what is needed are "mirror structures" that could be operated out of the OIE's eight existing regional offices (that participate in a OIE/FAO/WHO partnership). These regional structures would set up "Quality Centers" to provide technical support to member states and evaluate national projects. These regional structures would adapt "input" from the global level to regional needs. They would promote appropriate governance models, implement capacity building programs, and provide technical support to projects to improve national veterinary services. A specialized team would

organize seminars at the regional level including both developed and developing countries. For many years, Vallat reported, the OIE has worked to enhance capacity building in all regions -- working with national representatives and delegations - to improve local knowledge, for example organizing 6-7 seminars annually in each region. Other collaborative efforts focus on harmonization of policies. Thanks to recent health crises, these efforts have gained more recognition.

16. At the national level, Vallat explained that the OIE has developed standards associated with the quality of governance and public policy; this is in accordance with WHO goals to manage public health issues according to scientific standards. These standards are key to fighting avian flu. As of now, more than 100 developing countries cannot comply with standards designed to detect and control disease. Up until now, it has not been easy to interest the donor community in these efforts, because they have not been perceived as "demand-driven." Capacity building to improve the ability of countries to control diseases -- including vulnerability assessments of national veterinary services - is essential. Vallat observed that on-site staff training is a priority in some countries, as is improving national legislation, and assessing implementation of existing legislation. (Note: The OIE works in the context of the Standards and Trade Development Facility, established in 2002 in order to assist developing countries in meeting their WTO-SPS agreement obligations. THE WTO, FAO, and WHO also partner in this effort. End Note).

17. Vallat said that although there are many international organizations involved in current efforts to counter avian flu - including the World Bank, the WHO, the FAO -- the various players had succeeded in arriving at a common position and ongoing dialogue in the run-up to Beijing. At the November 7-9 Geneva Meeting on Avian Influenza, the OIE succeeded in gaining recognition of the importance of good governance, adequate veterinary standards, and effective legislation and administrative practices, as well as technical competence. Even before the current outbreak of avian flu, West Nile Disease and SARS taught the international community that if infrastructure is not strengthened, we will not be able to detect or prepare for future crises. Vallat noted increased interest in animal diseases due to their potential impact on public health, but stressed that these diseases also have a sometimes devastating impact on the livelihood of the rural poor. He seized Science Officer's analogy that efforts to put in place measures to counter avian flu and future crises are similar to current efforts to establish an international tsunami mitigation system: the challenge is to set up suitable infrastructure before a catastrophe takes place.

IOE-USG "Harmonization" on Avian Influenza is Positive

18. Vallat expressed appreciation at the fact that U/S Dobriansky called him in September 2005 to "harmonize" the communication and substance of USG measures to counter avian influenza. Overall, Vallat described the U.S. role within the OIE as positive, highlighting the fact that Amcit Alejandro Thiermann is president of the most important commission of the OIE - of the international animal health code -- and acts as his special advisor. Vallat expressed satisfaction that OIE's science-based standards were useful in resolving trade disputes between the U.S. and Canada and Japan.

19. Vallat said that he faces only two challenges regarding the OIE's relations with the US. The first is linked to the fact that the U.S. does not systematically implement OIE-agreed international standards. He said that this might over the long term hinder the U.S. position in countering trade barriers erected by other countries -- although he acknowledged the complexity of the U.S. regulatory system. The second challenge relates to the U.S. voluntary contribution to the OIE; U.S. annual dues to the OIE total 130,000 USD, the same as for other industrialized countries. Vallat encouraged the U.S. to increase its voluntary contribution - it currently ranks twelfth among member states. One possible opportunity would be to help finance the OIE's regional office located in Argentina and financed by the Argentine government. Vallat stressed that the U.S. benefits from this office, because it helps resolves trade problems before they lead to crises.

An "old lady" faces new challenges -- including terrorism

10. Vallat explained that the IOE dates from 1924. Its work has generated more interest post-mad cow: "Policymakers understand that we have an important role to play in policy relating to the link between animal health and public health." Vallat stressed that

globalization -- and the attendant increase in the movement of goods and people -- provides pathogens the opportunity to travel, and to become more dangerous via mutation and the exchange of genetic material. Vallat stressed as a particular concern the potential use of viral pathogens by terrorists; he cited the OIE's work with AMES lab in identifying potential terrorist tools, and devising guidance for governments on how to counter these.

11. Organizationally, the OIE includes 167 member states; the organization provides a network to facilitate direct contact in order to arrive at common positions at the technical level. Member states are represented by their chief veterinary officers, who provide a link between technical experts and those implementing policy. Vallat observed that most governments are more apt to invest more in animal diseases that pose a direct threat to human health. In furtherance of its goals, the OIE provides weekly updates on the propagation of 100 diseases, immediate alerts, and well as annual statistics related to animal health. This would be of use in combating bio-terrorism in that it would help identify sources of pathogens.

12. Another aspect of the OIE's mission stems from the fact that it is recognized by the WTO's as a standard setting body for veterinary services. The 150 labs affiliated with the OIE provide a scientific "common denominator" for these standards that are adopted by member states at annual meetings.  
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